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## Viewing cable 09RIYADH496, SCENESETTER FOR SENATOR BOND'S APRIL 6-8 VISIT TO

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### Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

### Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09RIYADH496**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09RIYADH496</a>	<a href="#">2009-03-31 14:32</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">SECRET//NOFORN</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Riyadh</a>

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NOFORN

DEPT FOR H(SHANE) AND H/RGF(LANG)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/31/2019  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR SENATOR BOND'S APRIL 6-8 VISIT TO  
SAUDI ARABIA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David Rundell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (U) The Embassy welcomes your visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This message provides a brief overview of key current issues in U.S. - Saudi relations, tailored to the particular issues that your Saudi interlocutors will likely raise with you.

2. (C) You will be arriving six days after an Arab League

Summit in Doha. Despite the Saudis pulling out all the diplomatic stops to ensure the summit conveyed publicly a sufficient degree of Arab unity, Libyan leader Muammar Qadhafi's eccentric outburst showed that deep fissures still exist. This was the second such embarrassment in the past three months showing the Arabs to be badly divided on regional security issues after public disagreements at the Arab Economic Summit in Kuwait in January.

#### U.S. Saudi Relations on the Mend

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13. (C) As you will hear, Saudi foreign policy calculations are driven by a deep fear and suspicion of expanding Iranian influence. While U.S.-Saudi relations have improved dramatically since their post-9/11 nadir, differences remain over U.S. Middle East policies. The Saudis have three principal issues areas of concern about U.S. policies:

--(C) As the author of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, King Abdallah risked his personal prestige to advocate a comprehensive Middle East peace as the "strategic option" for the Arabs, only to be frustrated by what he saw as U.S. reluctance to engage over the next seven years.

--(C) Similarly, in the Saudi view, we ignored advice from the King and Foreign Minister against invading Iraq. In the words of Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal, "military intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan has tilted the (regional) balance of power towards Iran."

--(C) Finally, the U.S. debate over whether and how to engage Iran has fueled Saudi fears that a new U.S. administration might strike a "grand bargain" without first consulting Arab countries bordering the Persian Gulf.

#### Appointment of Prince Nayif

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14. (C) Saudi King Abdallah issued a royal decree appointing his half-brother, Interior Minister Prince Nayif bin Abdalaziz, as second deputy prime minister March 27. The position had been vacant since Abdallah became King in 2005. Though the previous two crown princes held Nayif's new position prior to being formally tapped as heirs to the throne, this appointment does not necessarily mean Nayif is "Crown Prince in Waiting," because King Abdallah created a committee -- the Allegiance Council -- to select the King's successor.

15. (S) The King was likely driven by expediency. Crown Prince Sultan is for all intents and purposes incapacitated, and the King needed to travel abroad. Someone had to be left in charge and Nayif, by virtue of his seniority among the sons of Abdalaziz and his position as Minister of Interior, was by tradition the leading candidate for the job. Assistant Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayif (MBN) told the Ambassador that his father's appointment should not be seen in the light of succession, but as "an administrative necessity."

#### Internal security

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16. (C/NF) With our assistance, Saudi Arabia has largely defeated terrorism at home. The Saudis are now arguably our most important counterterrorist intelligence partner. They established tighter controls on charities and the transporting of cash to disrupt terrorist finance. We have signed an Information Sharing Agreement with the Kingdom and started to exchange Airline Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record (API/PNR) data to help track terrorist suspects and facilitate legitimate travel. We can say clearly that Saudi Arabia is now part of the solution, not the problem.

17. (S/NF) The Saudi leadership remains greatly concerned about the vulnerability of its energy production facilities,

and has put MBN of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in charge of efforts to acquire the capability to defend this key infrastructure. He is looking primarily to the U.S. to build this capability through an initiative formalized in May 2008 when Secretary Rice and Prince Nayif signed a TCA creating the Joint Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection. We have established an inter-agency, DOS/DOD/DOE, security advisory organization, the Office of Program Management-Ministry of Interior (OPM-MOI), to implement this bilateral security agreement. King Abdullah has made the protection of Saudi Arabia's critical infrastructure a top security priority, with MBN fully empowered to achieve this objective.

#### Rehabilitation Program

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¶8. (S/NF) We estimate that at least 1,500 former extremists have passed through the Interior Ministry's rehabilitation program for extremists (1,200 through the prison rehab program and 300 through the care center), including 119 Guantanamo returnees, with an overall recidivism rate of 8-10 percent. Despite the front page treatment of former Guantanamo detainee Sa'eed al-Shihri's appearance in Yemen, the real story of the Saudi rehabilitation program is one of success: at least 90 percent of its graduates appear to have given up jihad and reintegrated into Saudi society. The recidivists are the exception, not the rule. The Ministry takes a dynamic approach to the rehab program and will look for ways to strengthen it by learning from these incidents of recidivism.

¶9. (S/NF) We know less about recidivism among non-Guantanamo detainees since they were arrested here for activities inside Saudi Arabia and as such their cases are an internal Saudi matter. However we believe a small minority of these have re-engaged in violent extremist activity, and MOI tells us former Guantanamo detainees were harder to rehabilitate than this other category.

#### The Peace Process after Gaza

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¶10. (C) King Abdullah stated the Saudi position bluntly in the opening session of the January Summit in Kuwait: Israel should realize that the choice between peace and war will not be available indefinitely, and the Saudi-authored Arab Peace Initiative, currently on the table, will not remain there forever. However, the Saudis have made no move to withdraw the plan yet. Saudi and Arab public opinion have reacted strongly to the Israeli offensive on Gaza, creating intense pressure on Arab governments to act. The Saudis fear instability and increasing Iranian influence could result, and believe that there is a limited window of opportunity for action.

#### Iran

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¶11. (S) Iran remains the strategic threat at the forefront of Saudi security concerns. Senior U.S. officials visiting the Kingdom recently have heard the King expound at length about the great danger that Iran poses to the region. In general, the Saudi leadership has begun to look at all regional security issues through the prism of their fears about growing Iranian influence. They see Iran's activities as dangerously provocative, not only in Iraq, but also in Lebanon, Bahrain, Yemen, parts of Africa, and southeast Asia. King Abdullah met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki earlier this month, and subsequently informed the NSC's John Brennan that he had had a "heated exchange" with Mottaki, upbraiding him that "Persians" have no business meddling in "Arab" affairs and threatening that he would give Iran no more than a year to repair its relations in the region. Saudi intelligence chief Prince Muqrin told Brennan the "Shi'a crescent has become a full moon," implying that the Saudis are surrounded by Iranian intrigues.

¶12. (S) On Iranian nuclear activities, the Saudi view is that nations have the right to a peaceful nuclear program, but that Iran does not have the right to do what it is doing. The Saudis want to see a peaceful solution to the Iran nuclear problem but they also want reassurance that Saudi interests will be factored into any deal struck with Iran.

Afghanistan  
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¶13. (S/NF) We have been encouraging the Saudi government to be more active in support of the Karzai government, in particular by helping to train, or to fund the training of, Afghan security forces. Saudi Arabia has been helpful in providing assistance, but we would like them to do more. One area in which Saudi diplomacy has been forward leaning is in offering to help mediate between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

Pakistan  
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¶14. (C) The Saudis are extremely concerned about Pakistan's political fragility, and have worked hard, through their embassy in Islamabad, to bring the Pakistani factions together. Saudi relations with Pakistan have been strained because the Saudis don't trust Zardari and see him and other leading Pakistani politicians as corrupt. Zardari visited Saudi Arabia last November for talks with King Abdullah on Saudi support for the "Friends of Pakistan" initiative and oil subsidies. The visit was an opportunity for Zardari to persuade skeptical Saudis that he can be a trustworthy partner in managing one of Saudi Arabia's most important regional relationships, but his trip appears not to have resulted in new Saudi assistance or other commitments. The Saudis say they have been holding back economic and political support pending evidence that the political situation in Pakistan is stabilizing.

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